

Death drive: final tracings

James Riding

University of Exeter, UK

“I am not taking a pilgrimage,” I said to myself when I visited the graveyard at Port Bou in the spring of 2002. Indeed I was not even sure I wanted to visit the graveyard. I do not think this was entirely due to fear of cemeteries on my part. Nor was it because I am also attracted to them. It was more because I feel uncomfortable about what I discern as an incipient cult around the site of Benjamin’s grave, as if the drama of his death, and of the holocaust, in general, is allowed to appropriate and overshadow the enigmatic power of his writing and the meaning of his life. Put bluntly, the death comes to mean more than the life. This cult is at once too sad and sentimental, too overdetermined an event - the border crossing that failed, the beauty of the place, the horror of the epoch. It really amounts to a type of gawking, I thought to myself, in place of informed respect, a cheap frill with a frisson of tragedy further enlivened by the calm and stupendous beauty of the landscape. In any event, one does not worship at the grave of great thinkers. But what then is the appropriate gesture? Death is an awkward business. And so is remembrance.’

(Walter Benjamin’s Grave, Michael Taussig)

Foregrounding

This chapter traces the footprints of nature writer and poet Edward Thomas, from the beginning of his epically creative final four years, to the site where he died in 1917, during the Battle of Arras. It is presented as a series of engagements with landscape, writing, and poetry; affective mapping, chasing memory-prompts, *bookmarks* and the shock of the poetic. The journey seeks

to return to an 'open' idea of the geographical imagination, negating a negative, reductionist form of geography; shifting the focus away from sociologically determined notions of mobility. For writers and poets, the act of travelling through landscape is a process of interpretation, whereby they read the landscape, in a state 'open' to the poetic-event, enabling poesis (Ebbatson 2010). I have been searching for the shock of the poetic, re-walking and re-cycling the tracks of Edward Thomas, muddying the idea of singular being, energising my work with his, and in the process creating a travelogue. On these loops of the Downs, representation could actually be witnessed, felt, seen, heard, bumped into, and could therefore be researched like any other thing. Literature moored itself, detached itself, interacted with, reassembled and transformed the multiple places we travelled through. Becoming a part of the vitality of those places; affecting how we moved through them, manifesting itself as material compositions, as presentations in and of the world - not as representational imaginary, pattern, gaze, or construction overarching landscape (see Dewsbury et al, 2002: 437). In the *mêlée*, place and literature mutually perform each other adding, dissolving, maintaining, circulating and deconstructing meaning, symbolism, identity; with the two being held in a porous process of intertwining, becoming, and disentangling (see Nancy, 2000, for an outline of his philosophy of the *mêlée* rather than the *mélange* of place). The *mêlée* of things - representation included - going on, and moving about in the places we inhabit can be thought of as aesthetics.

The reason for this ambulatory homage was to attempt to find out something of what the subjective condition of the poet, or writer, emerges out of. The memory-work involved attends to poems as objects in the landscape, and in so doing attempts to understand something of the relationship between poetry - indeed all 'land writing' - and place. How it affects in-place? What it does in-place? My reading of geographical aesthetics is an original aesthetics of perception which shares many similarities with landscape phenomenology. This reading also shares many similarities with the way Edward Thomas works: a geographer-poet. These final tracings are concerned specifically with remembrance and memorials. The idea of the

‘appropriate gesture’ is explored in detail (Taussig 2006). Recent Geographical work, post non-representational theory, on landscape, perception, embodiment (Ingold, 1993, Tilley, 1994, Edensor, 2000, Wylie, 2002, 2005), memory (Pile, 2002, Lorimer and McDonald, 2002, Lorimer, 2003, 2006, Jones, 2005, Pearson, 2006), material culture, and the spectral (Cook et al, 2004, Till, 2005, Edensor, 2005, De Silvey, 2006, 2007) has pointed towards a use of creative non-fiction incorporating a material attentiveness as a method of analysis: this is poetry *as* experience - an affective mapping, of more-than-human entanglements (entanglements with representation - witnessing a crumpling of time, place, and words).

Preamble

For the last four years I have walked rough-circles with a literary society called *The Edward Thomas Fellowship*: a band of brothers, established to perpetuate his life and work and to conserve the countryside known to Edward Thomas and recorded in his writings. As part of this memory-work they repeatedly loop his former homes and conduct site-readings of poems in the exact point in the landscape they represent. Unlike the memory-work the *Fellowship* do, this final tracing was going to be transient; in and out. A different way of memorialising: a creative remembering, and perhaps an ‘appropriate gesture’ (Taussig 2006: 6) - embedding elements into the landscape for a short period for others to find. It was never going to be as permanent a landmark as Ian Hamilton Finlay leaves - the concrete poet - or one of the many memorials which memorialise Edward Thomas. But that was not the affect that was needed. They should work with the writings already present, and together. And perhaps encourage a re-reading of the texts associated with the place and even create new experiences of place - covering the village with new words. The bits of paper attentive to the form and experience of walking in landscape were tucked under branches ready to be found, or to decompose before any finding - more like the work of Alec Finlay or Thomas A Clark.

Six months or so prior to this final tracing, I had re-ridden the route Edward Thomas took in his book *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914). The recycling re-considered poetry and its relationship to place - post-*Fellowship* - following Edward through literature and landscape; emphasising the problem with elevating certain types of place over others. A pursuit of what Marion Shoard termed *Edgelands* (2002). Not in terms of what she and poets Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts delineate as *Edgelands* (2011) - a fluid rural-urban fringe. Though these messy bits of England have been ignored for too long - since the days of Richard Jefferies and the classic series of excursions, *Nature Near London* (1883) - as Michael Symmons Roberts and Paul Farley have argued in their book celebrating jittery, jumbled, broken ground on the edges of cities: a *true wilderness*. Rather an idea of *Edgelands*, as all encompassing - all is *Edgelands*. The pursuit emphasised the in-betweenness of my wanderings - Edward/Me, We/I, City/Country, Society/Nature, Structure/Agency, Subjective/Objective, Subject/Object, Human/Non-Human, Person/Thing, Bachelard/Deleuze, Phenomenology/Post-Structuralism, Psychogeography/New Nature Writing, Life/Death, Imagination/Materiality, Northern/Southern, Rich/Poor, Old/Young, Here/Gone, Couple/Single. *Replacing* dower forms of remembrance. The challenge set by Mike Pearson in *Performing the Past* (2007). This final remembering though would take that diversion a step further. It would be the culmination of four years work. In which I traced the last four years of footprints left by Edward Thomas: it is in the end only a creative biography. What Edward produced was a historical materialism of *bookmarks*, of imagination, resurrecting Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the rest - a paper trail in the margins. And by the end *he* was reborn, just like flowers in spring. He is remembered herewith. Elegy though, is never enough (Lorimer 2011).

Memorial Stone

09.11.11. Very early morning, *Imperial War Museum* archive. You are not allowed to take photographs. They are not going to be reproduced. You are not allowed to take photographs. Scribble it down on scraps of paper instead. Eyes clogged with sleep dust still, head a little

fuzzy. There was stuff here that no one had ever bothered to look at. Why would anyone? A document about an *Edward Thomas Centenary Memorial*: signed in 1978 by Myfanwy Thomas, youngest daughter of the poet and writer Edward Thomas, Alec Guinness, famous actor and local resident, Jill Balcon, famous actress and local resident, and Douglas Sneglan, the then vicar of Steep - the village in East Hampshire, where a sarsen stone memorial was installed on a hill above in 1937. It will be the centenary of his death soon. The document began with a quotation: *Steep on Tuesday, and for all I know ever after*. These words headed a letter written by Edward Thomas on July 21st, 1913 as he moved in to his third and last house in the village. He had just returned from a bike ride *In Pursuit of Spring*, a poetic undertaking out of the capital west, met little known American poet Robert Frost a matter of weeks earlier, who would tell him the pursuit springwards was a succession of poems and to begin writing poetry, and was about to learn of the First World War, in which he would soon be killed by a stray shell at the Battle of Arras. Steep was to become, during his final four years, the centre of his spiralling world: the mainspring of his poetry. The pursuit of spring - from his childhood home - is often overlooked as an important milestone in his life. On it he finds the beginnings of his poetic voice. *In Pursuit of Spring* was first published in April 1914, following its writing up. By December 1914 Edward had written his first poem. Into the next two years he crammed all his verse writing. As the document in the *Imperial War Museum* archive said, most were written about Steep. In addition to the pursuit springwards, Edward had been walking rough-circles almost daily from home and back, since moving to the village. He abused notebooks on these loops. It was though the writing of *In Pursuit of Spring* that provided Edward with a greater understanding of the self. It also gives the reader an insight into his split psyche, his depressive illnesses. He writes down some of the demons that had been plaguing him, using the pursuit as a form of therapy. The pursuit itself lived on in his poems. Whole sections of prose from the pursuit were fashioned into haunting depictions of landscape. Landscape threatened by war and the relentless force of industrialisation. No one should write anything about themselves without first reading an Edward Thomas poem. The *Other Man* his doppelganger is a recurrent

character; his other self, his nagging doubt. A slight on the lack of spiritual fulfilment the modern self has. He recurs again and again in his poems, and is first introduced in the book *In Pursuit of Spring*. Riding westward out of the capital was to be the start of his epically creative last four years.

The un-photographable A4 single sheet document confirmed that a memorial to mark the centenary of his birth - March 3rd 1978 - would be placed in Steep. To compliment the entire hillside above that had already been dedicated to the memory of Edward Thomas. He would be in Steep, *ever after*. The hill has, since 1980 especially, become a site of pilgrimage. A literary society founded then - known as the *Edward Thomas Fellowship* - has grown up around the site. They repeat a birthday walk yearly, culminating in a site-reading by the inscribed stone. It has essentially become a grave where flowers and poems are left - his body though is buried in Agny Military Cemetery, north-east France, near where he was killed. Like the Walter Benjamin memorial in Port Bou, on the border between Spain and France; the *Edward Thomas Memorial Stone* is a fake grave, depending on how we classify a grave. In his non-pilgrimage to the site where Walter Benjamin took his own life, fleeing the Nazis, Michael Taussig (2006:4) writes: 'When we get down to it, why trust that any grave contains what it's supposed to? One of the most important events in life, namely, death, is so shrouded in secrecy and fear that most of us would never dare to check. Who knows what goes on up there in the graveyard of Port Bou? Maybe none of the graves have the right body, or any at all?' I would add to that; why does it matter whether a grave contains bones? The body does not hold the remnants of who we are in death - does it even hold who we are in life? Edward Thomas is a very good example of the distributed self.

In addition to the memorial stone above Steep, the *Fellowship* has drawn all over the village itself. Each of the three houses that he rented there has an oval plaque adorning its frontage. *Edward Thomas Poet lived here*. And opposite a war memorial with his name on, there are two lancet windows in the church representing his life. A life that has to an extent been reduced to a

final few years: the years when he reached a creative tipping point, and began writing poetry at an astonishing rate. And to his death: his heroic death at war - a war which still haunts this quiet corner of East Hampshire. The cult is at once too sad, too sentimental (Taussig 2006: 6). Oddly the house where he was born, 61 Shelgate Road, Clapham Junction, declares: *London County Council EDWARD THOMAS 1878-1917 ESSAYIST AND POET lived here*. The blue plaque marked his whole life -1878-1917 - not the years he dwelt in the house, telling also something of his previous life as an essayist. It was placed there not by the *Edward Thomas Fellowship* but by *London County Council*. The terraced house was just off Northcote Road. Clapham is a typical busy London suburb. Not somewhere Edward particularly liked being brought up, hence why he moved to the little village of Steep. A village which has become an Edward Thomas theme village; as if all he ever was, was the local hero poet. And that poetry was something transcendental that simply flowed forth when he looped the place.

Another poet of the same era, Thomas Sturge Moore, lived in the village but is forgotten mostly, overwritten by the memory-work of the *Edward Thomas Fellowship*. It is as if they have claimed the place for Edward Thomas - and all the place now is, is a memorial, a poem, an imaginary, thanks in part to their material reminders. Their name suggests so. *Fellowship* implies *stewardship*, *ownership*; guardians, protectors of the *landscape*. It suggests an older understanding of landscape, *landschaft*, shaped not by landscape painting and photography (see Olwig 1996). But by stories and tales which distribute a territorial belonging, creating a sense of community - for those that are part of the cult. The village is cluttered with poems, now *landmarks*; festooned with *bookmarks*. They may have been forgotten sites without the mapping of a few intrepid members of a literary society.

Afternoon: Steep, East Hampshire, in the traces of Edward Thomas again. This is not a pilgrimage - I kept telling myself. Simply a final act of remembrance in Steep - the first without the *Fellowship* present - on the way to somewhere I had resolved to visit, despite this supposedly not being a pilgrimage: the site of his death near Arras and his grave in Agny - a

place where as of yet the *Fellowship* have left well alone. The village of Steep is set around two streets at the base of the hill with the memorial stone atop. And another that runs along the ridge and leads to the stone. Two of the houses rented by Edward are below, one above. I began my intervention at the solitary pine, covering the village with new words. In a field alone beneath the pined ridge - the stone just about visible. The bits of paper attentive to the form and experience of walking in landscape were tucked under branches ready to be found, or to decompose before any finding. On the paper was a poem, entitled *End*. It was written about the solitary pine. I had found the solitary pine, written about in *No One So Much as You* - a poem by Edward Thomas - on my first meeting with a couple of members of the *Edward Thomas Fellowship*. It felt like an end; a gift to Edward.

End

*The pit of my stomach fell out
at the sight of the solitary pine.
Seeing it alone, rooted, in the centre
of a vast expanse of dusty green
lit faded memories. They flashed
as the pine loitered in my head
bringing to an end the distant
dream of redemption I had had.*

From the solitary pine I drove to a pub. It was frequented on my third meeting with the *Edward Thomas Fellowship*. A rough-circle walk with a solitary member, called Doug. We had walked to the *Chalk-Pit* and back. The accidental amphitheatre had been written about by Edward in 1915. The seventeenth century pub called the *Harrow Inn* was a regular haunt of his. I wrote a poem after discussing the life of actor, local resident, and fan of poetry, Alec Guinness, with Doug - also a regular at the pub. It was not open for some reason but there were people inside. As I drove away, after leaving the poem on a pub bench, someone came out to read it. They were bemused by the fly posting.

Pub drunk

*It was a scruffier pub in his day;
set in the middle of the Hangers
winded around by vines
propping up the frontage,
inside a smoking room
and a variety of ales in barrels.*

*The toilets remained unchanged
on the opposite side of the lane -
a tarmac garden of sorts;
the endearing outdoor bogs
with a trough to piss in,
enclosed the dozen or so benches
in crumbling brick structures.*

*Greengage, apple, mulberry, and fir trees
were spotted with delphiniums, poppies,
everlasting-sweet peas, roses and dahlias.
While in a shady corner campanula,
phlox, and allium grew.
The solitude of this spot
meant he never moved far.*

*One would see whilst walking
him always sat here drinking -
the last time he was pottering around
all stooped over with a head of white hair.
Not long after this visit he passed away -
his wife died too a few months later;
she would walk the dog this way
to fetch him back home.*

It was time to head up to the common site of pilgrimage - the memorial stone that looked down on the village. I drove back out of the village, past *The Aspens* and the two houses with their plaques. The road twisted uphill through a pine forest. A deep coombe was beneath, *The Path*, *The Mill-Water* and *A Tale* down there. I parked beside *The New-House* and walked the rest of the way. The view came in installments, until I reached the stone; out from beneath the canopy. Michael Taussig (2006: 6) and his words still haunted what I was doing:

'This cult is at once too sad and too sentimental, too overdetermined an event - the border crossing that failed, the beauty of the place, the horror of the epoch. It really amounts to a type of gawking, I thought to myself, in place of informed respect, a cheap thrill with the frisson of tragedy further enlivened by the calm and stupendous beauty of the landscape. The beauty of the place, the horror of the epoch.'

Driving from the memorial stone to his actual grave; still unsure as to whether that was a good idea. Or whether it was a tracing too far, to follow Edward to war, and in a sense bring war back to this place. When I got to the stone though, I realised that the war was never going to go away. There was a poppy stuck under the octagonal plaque, on the face of the sarsen stone, and some flowers had been left. So I got about my business of remembering. And left another poem - this time for no one but Edward - but in all likelihood one of the *Fellowship*. I slipped under the flowers a poem written about the hillside - Edward's Hill - called *Gazing*. I had written it, again, after my walk with Doug, when we had stared from this spot.

Gazing

*A narrow chalk path aslant; ascending
not directly over the crest like in the past,
via the sparkling shards of willow pattern plate
but up a shallow slope hung above a patch of pine,
on the side of the hanger amongst dense beech.*

*A short cut facing out to sea; climbing
at pace the natural staircase
jutting from the sheer scarp face,
a slippage of faults in soft porous rock.*

*Erosion of the cliffs over Petersfield,
selfsame strata dive down to the sea at Dover
dug away at through the toil of wind and water,
this southern most band of calcium carbonate.*

*On the landing a smooth plateau;
a sweep of the head from right to left,
sixty miles of sands and clays in an instant.*

*Eye now racing from the rising tide to a suicide;
the tormented Woolf hearing voices
fills pockets full of stones and drowns herself.*

*A statue marks the spot of death,
a pilgrimage site for a brisk mourning walk,
throw yourself into the river in a macabre homage
to a prominent member of the Bloomsbury set*

*and not to forget, Algernon Charles Swinburne
past those smooth-swelling unending downs,
on the south coast walking the line
ignoring those grey seaside towns.*

After canvassing the village, cluttering it with representation, I drove to two other famous sites nearby. The first was the green lane. Edward had written a poem about it in late 1916. He was just about to be given some leave. During which he returned to 13 Rusham Road, Clapham, over Christmas to see his family, before shipping out to France. He only wrote two more poems after that. I left there the first poem I ever wrote. It was written after finding a dead mole with Colin and Larry; two members of the *Edward Thomas Fellowship* that I first met in summer 2008 - and the start of the *bookmarking*, the affective mapping; chasing footprints, dowsing energy fields, across poetic lay lines, between ancient sites.

Mole

*Water had gathered in the deep trenches
where wheels had passed over for centuries,
down the narrow treacherous green lane.*

*Drenched cheap trainers began digging at my feet
leaving me looking down more often to concentrate,
I noticed when slowing and studying my gait
on the ground a dead mole face up arms outstretched;
there was not a scratch upon it.*

*Its heart stopped from a fright, a loud noise,
perhaps a blast from a gun. Bending down
I reached for the mole and stroked the fur on its belly,
before picking it up. It was not larger than my palm;
touching it I was surprised at its warmth and its softness.
Not long since it had gone.*

I would drive to 13 Rusham Road, in the traces of Edward, after doing one final thing - the last thing in a landscape that I had spent four years looping. From the green lane I drove past the pub with no name - about which Edward wrote his first poem - to the *Manor Farm*. It is the site of a poem, written by Edward in 1914. It is of all his poems the one where the poem does seem to 'furbish the charm' of the place (Thomas 1914: 100). The poem is also the most idyllic of all his poems - the 'rural idyll.' And you really can imagine him coming here again and again, writing the perfect poem. Before walking over to the farm, yew, and church, I left a description of a meeting. The first meeting with the group of people who work tirelessly to preserve his memory. There is an old phone box there. Inside it, in the shadow of the manor farm I left, *A Meeting*. This place, on that first meeting with it, held no connection with my psyche. Now, in the part of the brain where psychology and topology meet, it coaxes vast forlorn horizons, monumental emptiness, whole mournful memoryscapes. This is why identity as being simply your roots, where you are from, is a divisive fantasy. It pre-constructs the self, and traps the individual. Cosmopolitanism is the enemy of nationalism, regionalism - the impossible possibility of rootlessness.

A Meeting

*A literary society
bent on revering a poet,
the forgotten chap of words
worried me a little.*

*After ten minutes or so
two gentlemen arrived
sporting suitable attire,
carrying poems and an explorer map.*

*Dressed in gear,
less shiny than imagined;
woollen socks, corduroy trousers, leather boots, tweed cap.
The cagoule was bagged.*

*A blue aluminium stick on show
jutting from a hand,
indicating that I had not driven through time
but the Downs of Southern England.*

I was told on my first meeting with the *Fellowship*, a famous story. It was the story of why Edward went to war - he was over the age of conscription. The story is often regaled on the *Edward Thomas Fellowship* birthday walks; memorial-loops. Edward was asked by his good friend Eleanor Farjeon why he wanted to go to war and what he was fighting for. Edward replied by scooping up some earth, crumbling it in his hand, and sprinkling it out. Literally for this, he said. It is this story that I have always been fascinated by, as his body was never returned to the soil he crumbled. The final thing that I was going to take from this landscape was some soil. And transport it to Agny, and his grave. The ancient yew he wrote of so beautifully, had been in the landscape for centuries before Edward, and would be there centuries after. From beneath it I took a handful of earth.

[INSERT ILLUSTRATION 1 HERE – PORTRAIT]

Illustration 1. Photograph of a poem and flowers left at the memorial stone

Grave

11.11.11. Odd singularity; cosmic portal transit date - poetic lay-lines eminent, particularly on this date of remembrance. Trekking from 15 (formerly 13) Rusham Road across the Channel - Southampton to Le Havre by boat, ending up in the flat, flat land of north-east France. Gravelines: the name of the first place in France off the boat, and also the titular name of this final tracing - a death drive from the memorial village, and his poems, to the grave, and on to the grave of Wilfred Owen: a transportation of earth, nature, poetry - earth-growth itself (see Lorimer 2008). I was glad it was nearly all over. It needed to come to an end. I wanted to be myself again, remove Edward: a part of me since summer 2008. The death drive had become apparent over the four years in the traces of Edward. How can it be a form of therapy to write down experiences? You end up never really feeling, or confronting, anything. Instead look down on a version of yourself moving about places. Emotions are prevented from being fully understood and bad times are never gotten over. They are instead, as if by magic, turned to prose. Or, even worse, bad times are manufactured, in order to become muted prose. It is cyclical.

Mud, cloying mud, beneath a dreary sky: nothing else for miles. As if a giant rotavator had passed over the whole landscape, chopping everything up. These were the famous fields; nowhere to hide. Dug into the land are trenches - some left open, like an open wound: for memory's sake. There were no wild poppies - not even they can survive modern farming techniques. Arras had two squares. Around which cafes noised. Middle-aged Americans were heard through the din. Here to re-visit the war: dark tourism - a fine line between curiosity and gorging. They spoke of memorabilia - old guns, ammunition, medals. And sites of interest. A parade passed by. I had to get out of the open. It was too busy. Heading in the car to Beaurains instead. It was seemingly just a through-place to somewhere else - flanking a single road for half a mile on leaving Arras. There was no mention of Edward in the place he died. The

observation post was nowhere to be found. You go through a field and down the back of a garage to get to the graveyard. It backs on to a street of grey houses - put there at a later date. Agny was small but it was difficult to find - hidden away, intimate. The feel of the place was a monument to death in itself. Cold scrubland: a wonderful behindness to the scene. I remembered the triumphant memorial stone at Steep - surveying all before it.

Graveyard, cemetery: peaceful. In contradistinction to the path leading to it; it was neat, ordered. Mist clung to the cherry trees around about. And as in the Edward Thomas poem *The Cherry Trees* (1916), they

bend over and are shedding

On the old road where all that are passed are dead.

Grave stones stood in numbered lines, facing a single large cross. Roots and branches encroached and overhung; as if nature was trying to take the space back. It was a deadly silent little patch of earth. Row C Grave 43, was through the only entrance and off to the right. The site mimicked the epic silence that fell, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918. When after four years of fighting, The Great War was finally over. Lest we forget: how we remember. Bits of poetry were inscribed on gravestones. Most had the *Ode of Remembrance* taken from the Laurence Binyon poem *For the Fallen* (1914) at their base.

And there it was. Before me: the stone I had been searching for. *Second Lieutenant P.E. Thomas, Royal Garrison Artillery, 9th April 1917, Poet.* The grave next door sadly had written on it: *A Soldier of the Great War, Known unto God.* It made the non-pilgrimage seem silly and ridiculous. Although I did feel a strange sense of an ending, a giving up of memories, of the past; knowing what was about to happen. On the grave I had come to pay my respects to, were previous signs of homage. Grass was slightly worn directly in front of it. And it was the only grave in the cemetery with something left at its base. There was a weathered piece of paper with a poem written on it, a photograph of Adlestrop train station - closed in 1966: a bench is now all that is left, with a plaque on it that quotes the famous poem - and a couple of poppies. The poem

scribbled on the decaying paper was poignant. Someone who knew of Edward well had left it. It was not a famous poem like, *Adlestrop* - always included in best loved poems anthologies. Rather an obscure one, that has recently become the title of a new biography. The final three stanzas were written down, although the last one had been taken by the rain and wind. I sprinkled the soil from beneath the yew, and patted it down - reuniting Edward with the soil of England: a collapse of self and world impossible in life, achieved in death.

[INSERT ILLUSTRATION 2 HERE – LANDSCAPE]

Illustration 2. Photograph of poem left at graveside

Epilogue

Before leaving I wanted to know something of the other dead buried in the graveyard. A register was held neatly inside a gate post. It explained:

The cemetery contains 408 commonwealth burials of the First World War, 118 of them unidentified, and 5 German graves. It was begun by French troops, and used by Commonwealth units and field ambulances from March 1916 to June 1917. Two further burials were made in April 1918. And in 1923-24, 123 graves were brought in from battlefields east of Arras. The original 40 French graves have since been removed.

A visitor's book was attached to the register. Most comments were about Edward Thomas. Here are some of them:

I came from Spain to visit Edward Thomas, one of the greatest poets England has given, RIP / I remember Adlestrop / To honour all those brave men and to find Edward Thomas / Remembering Edward Thomas, English Lit graduate and researcher of the poet / Ex Lincoln College remembering Edward Thomas / Visiting the poet P.E. Thomas, thank you and all your comrades / In honour of all those who died and fought, and Edward Thomas / Visiting poet Edward Thomas whose poetry I admire, and which sustained me when sad / Peaceful beautiful place, remembering Philip Edward Thomas and other World War One heroes / Beautiful place, well cared for, very moving - I remember Adlestrop / We came to find Edward Thomas / Re-read 'As the team's head brass...' wonderful poem, RIP Edward Thomas / Edward Thomas, All roads lead to France / Came to see Edward Thomas' grave, RIP.

From there I drove away - my attempt to forget, through a final remembering, failed - to the grave side of another member of the Artists' Rifles, Wilfred Owen: the poet who robbed war of its last shred of glory. Unlike the poems of the period the monuments shamefully lack the nerve to project the awful purpose of themselves. They are a betrayal of the dead: victims of an incapacity, century just past, to devise a commemorative mode - a century that, more than any other, needed such a mode. Most memorials are inimical to meditative remembrance. They purposefully forget, wipe over, sanitise history. An exercise in gaining an aesthetic sensibility is

something which counteracts this; as poets of the period did. There is a poetics there which can be harnessed, if a glimmer of the subjective condition of the poet creeps in to interpretations of landscape: the shock of the poetic. This is ultimately what this chapter attends to: an ‘opening’ up of Geographic methodology, in light of recent non-representational work, which has shown the way. This opening enables a giving back to landscape and the people who wrote it so honestly and eloquently: ‘an appropriate gesture’ (Taussig, 2006).

The stones of Arras: pilgrimage.

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Source: Riding 2011.

Figure 2. Source: Riding 2011.

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